

Search of Heritage

Baptists Prior To The Year 1845

By Leonard Hill
Managing Editor,
The Baptist Program

Credit for beginning the first Baptist church in America must go to Roger Williams — a free thinker and radical among radicals in the New World. In 1638, he and 11 others formed a Baptist church in Providence, Rhode Island.

Williams' principal contribution to religion, however, was not the founding of the first Baptist church in America, but his battle for religious liberty one of the primary Baptist tenets.

Williams' church had no "children" — no off shoots, no missions. Williams himself remained a member only a few months before resigning to become a Seeker.

A more substantial Baptist root in American Baptist history can be traced to the seaport village of Kittery, Maine. There, William Screven, after leaving the established church in 1681, helped to organize a Baptist church. He became the first pastor.

He was jailed and fined for opposing infant baptism and released only after he promised to leave Maine. In 1684 (or 1683) Screven and other Baptists settled in the Charleston, S. C., area, and established the first Baptist church in the South.

John Clarke who emigrated to New England to find freedom of conscience did more to establish early Baptist strength here than did the short-term Baptist, Roger Williams. By 1644 Clarke and the church he founded near Newport, Rhode Island, were Baptist.

The surrounding community was

hardly impressed. Clarke and two friends were arrested, charged with unauthorized preaching, denying the lawfulness of infant baptism, and other offenses. Clarke got off with a fine. One of the other men was made a public example and was brutally beaten in the streets of Boston.

Baptists from England and Wales continued to migrate to the New World to escape the persecution of the kings, James I and Charles I. But persecution took a faster ship and was waiting their arrival on American shores.

Philadelphia Association
Only in Pennsylvania was the situation different. William Penn's Colony afforded welcomed peace for all suffering Christians, and Baptists took advantage of it.

As Baptist churches were formed there they began coming together quarterly for fellowship, inspiration, and advice on doctrinal matters. Out of these meetings came the Philadelphia Association in 1707, the first Baptist association in the new land.

Baptist growth received a boost from unexpected sources — the Congregational churches of New England and the Great Awakening (1725 - 50). The Established Church had become staid, stale and sterile. It created a spiritual vacuum which Baptists helped to fill.

The Great Awakening, emphasizing individual conversion and the new birth, raised the moral tone of the whole country for a brief time. Congregationalism was shaken to its foundations and divided in sympathies.

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SBC History Is Marked By Many Great Moments

By Davis C. Woolley
Executive Secretary,
SBC Historical Commission

When the Southern Baptist Convention organized in 1845, its constitution provided for expansion into all the United States. Two boards were established, but with provisions for as many other boards as the convention needed for its benevolent work.

Since that day, May 10, 1845 in Augusta, Ga., the convention has through the past 125 years grown to the point it is now the largest Protestant denomination in the nation.

From 4,126 churches in 1845, the SBC has grown to 34,335 churches reported in 1970. Membership has increased from 350,000 church members in 1845 to 11,489,613 reported in 1970. The number of boards has increased from two to four boards and seven other agencies.

The two boards — Foreign Mission Board located in Richmond, and Domestic Missions then located in Marion, Ala. — went into business as soon after the convention as possible with missionaries at work.

In the beginning, the convention refused to start a publication board, though there was strong sentiment for one. By 1849, a group of interested persons organized the Southern Baptist Publication Society located in Charleston, S. C., but it was not an agency of the convention. Then, in 1851, the convention authorized a Bible Board to be located in Nashville.

In this same year, J. R. Graves set forth his "Landmark Statement" at the Big Hatchie Association at Cotton Grove, Tenn.

For more than 50 years Landmarkism caused controversy among Southern Baptists until the followers of these teachings withdrew from the convention in 1905 and organized the General Association of Landmark Baptists.

Another great moment in Southern Baptist history took place in 1859

when alongside the convention was formed the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary located at Greenville, S. C. Later it was recognized as an agency of the convention.

When the War Between The States came with all its fury, the Bible Board was swept away, as was the Publication Society. The Convention organized in the midst of the war in 1863 the Baptist Sunday School Board to produce literature for the churches of the South. The seminary which had closed in 1862 was re-opened in 1865, and after struggling to remain open, it moved to Louisville in 1877.

In 1866 at the meeting in Russellville, Ky., the convention voted to meet annually thereafter.

The years following the war were so severe that the Sunday School Board was about to collapse when the convention voted to combine the Sunday School Board. The Domestic Board of Missions in 1873. The next year the name of the combined Board was changed to The Home Mission Board.

Another great moment in the life of the convention came in 1888, though there is no reference to it in the convention proceedings and reports for that year. It was the organization of Woman's Missionary Union as an auxiliary to the convention.

The women in a number of states had been organized to promote giving and praying for missions. It was another 30 years before the convention gave the women the status of messengers, and then two years long.

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SBC Historical Issue

Since the approaching Denver session of the Southern Baptist Convention will observe the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in Augusta, Ga., in 1845, this issue of the Baptist Record is dedicated to the history of the convention.

Page one is devoted altogether to the highlights connected with that history and most of the inside pages likewise carry pictures and related stories of the events.

Page three is an "inside page one" which carries the news that usually appears on page one.

Mississippians In Southern Baptist Life

By Anne Washburn McWilliams

Men from Mississippi gleam as golden threads in the rich tapestry of Southern Baptist history. From 1845 to 1970, Mississippi has done her share in furnishing Southern Baptist leaders of top quality.

For the past three and one-half decades, there have been only two executive secretaries of the Baptist Sunday School Board. Both are native Mississippians. The first editor of the Baptist Record was four times president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and was one of the men who helped to draw up the recommendation that brought the Sunday School Board into being. A Mississippi native was executive secretary of the Home Mission Board, SBC.

Mississippi was the Sunday School Board's first BYPU secretary. A Mississippi native was first director of the Sunday School Board's Department of Student Work. The same Mississippi native was originator of the student retreat at the greatest Assembly. Of the five Southern Baptist theological seminaries, three Mississippians have been president of two for at least 20 years. A man who had lived in Mississippi for a considerable length of time was placed in charge of the Sunday School Board's new department of Sunday School Administration in 1920. Another long-time Mississippi native, a pastor, was the first executive secretary of the Historical Commission, SBC. For 25 years a Mississippi native was executive secretary of the Home Mission Board, SBC.

The roll call is indeed illustrious: JAMES BRUTON GAMBRELL, four times president of the Southern Baptist Convention, helped to prepare the recommendation that brought the Sunday School Board into being at the SBC in 1891. He and Dr. J. M. Frost of Virginia spent a day together in a hotel room in Birmingham, Ala., writing the recommendation.

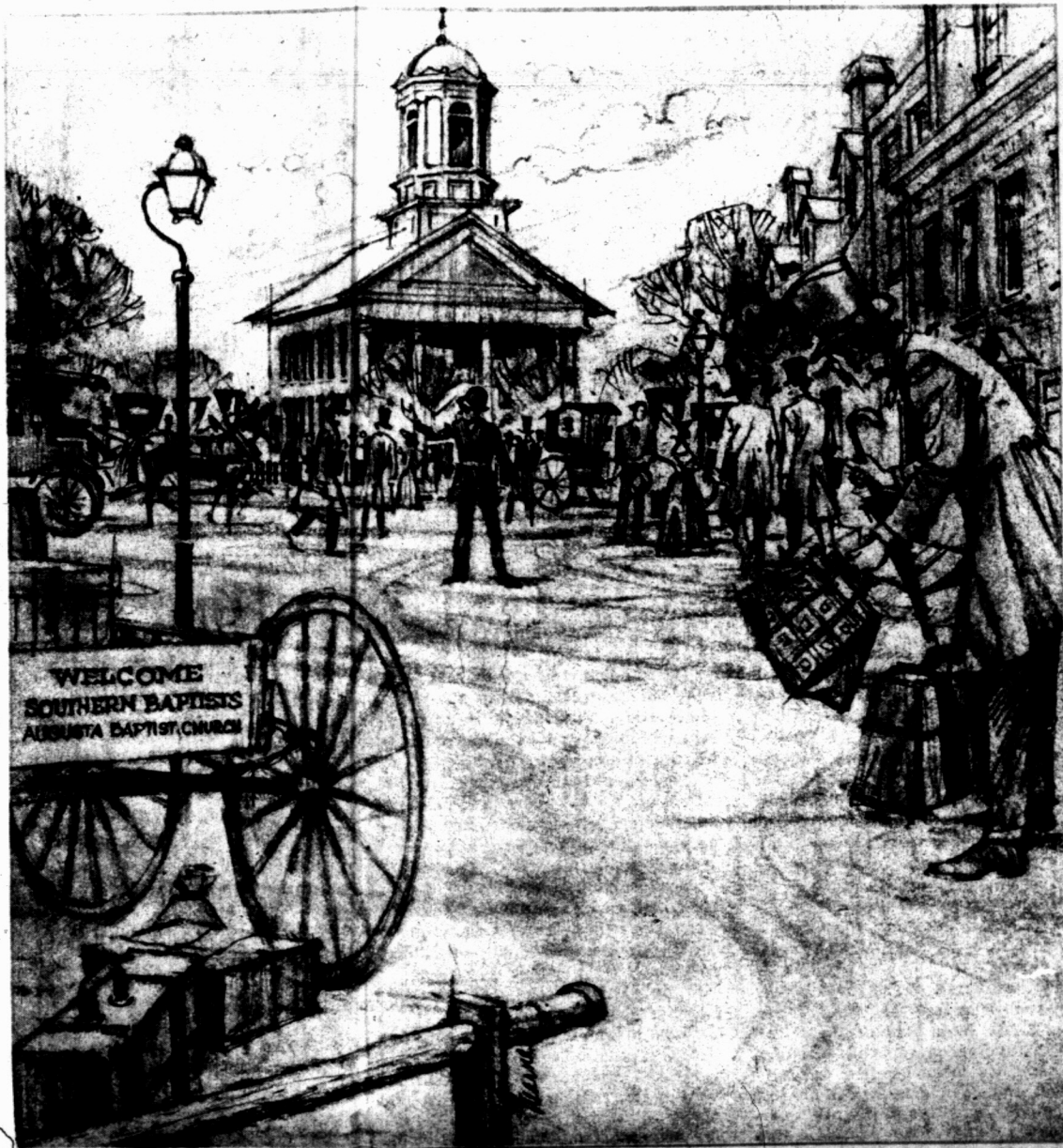
Gambrell moved with his parents from South Carolina to Tippah County, Miss., in 1845, when he was four years old. He was pastor in West Point, Oxford, and Clinton, Miss.; he was Mississippi Baptists' executive secretary, 1885-87; he was first editor of the Baptist Record, 1877-91.

RICHMOND B. GUNTER was a member of the committee that insti-

gated the Cooperative Program in 1925. He was born in Leake County, Miss., in 1880. While he was pastor at First Church, Louisville, Miss., his church was probably the first in Mississippi, and one of the first in the SBC to use the percentage division of gifts. He was a member of the Future Program Commission, later to be called the Cooperative Program Commission, which recommended to the 1925 session of the SBC, meeting in Memphis, that "from the adoption of this report by the Convention our co-operative work be known as the Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists."

A 1907 graduate of Mississippi College, Dr. Gunter was executive secretary of the Mississippi Baptist Con-

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Delegates Arrive For First SBC Meeting In Augusta

DELEGATES ARRIVE—By horseback, rail, and ship. 293 delegates arrived in Augusta, Ga., in May 1845 to organize the Southern Baptist Con-

vention. The church where the meetings were held is pictured in this sketch by Erwin M. Hearne, Jr.

Those Days In May Of 1845; What Happened In Augusta

By Lynn E. May Jr.,
Research Director,
SBC Historical Commission

Excitement ran high in Augusta as Baptists arrived in town for the convention scheduled to begin the next day. The Augusta Baptist Church had arranged accommodations for 130 delegates, but more than twice that number came! Southern hospitality prevailed, however, and before the evening grew late, a place had been found for everyone.

Delegates from eight states and the District of Columbia, traveled to Augusta by boat, train, stage, and private conveyance. Those who came by horseback committed their horses

to the care of the local livery stable for 30½ cents per day.

Two delegates from Maryland and a thirty-member delegation from Virginia traveled by rail and by boat. One of their number, J. B. Jeter, later wrote about traveling from Wilmington, North Carolina, to Charleston, South Carolina, by steamer. They encountered a severe storm that made them extremely seasick and caused the inexperienced landlubbers to fear a disastrous shipwreck.

The role of Southern ministers as defenders of slavery and the extent of their clash with those Northern ministers who supported abolitionism was vividly portrayed by Jeter. He wrote:

"When the peril had passed this thought forced itself on our minds: If we had perished our fate would have been deemed decisive proof that slavery was wrong, and that God visited its defenders with a just and signal judgment. A thousand pulpits would have proclaimed the instructive lesson of the fearful providence."

Some Southern leaders saw the meeting in Augusta as an opportunity to realize their vision of a national convention which would be broad in its

scope and purpose and centralized in its operation.

Richard Furman and William Bullein Johnson of South Carolina, along with Luther Rice had sought without success to lead Baptists to organize the Baptist General Convention, first national Baptist body, by this pattern when it was formed in 1814.

The society method, that is, the formation of separate, independent bodies for each facet of denominational work, continued to prevail among Baptists in America. But one idea was never lost among Baptists in the South — the vision of a national body broad enough in its purposes to engage in a wide range of activities.

Furman Johnson, and others gave this denominational concept its first real test in 1821 when they led in forming the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

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Foundation For The Future

An Editorial

Southern Baptists well could spend their entire session in Denver simply lifting their voices in thanksgiving and praise to God for his blessings upon them during the century and a quarter of their history.

It is questionable whether any other denomination in Christian history has been so richly blessed.

It has been the blessing of growth.

It has been the blessing of fellowship.

It has been the blessing of unity, even in diversity.

It has been the blessing of expanding vision.

It has been the blessing of a continually enlarging program.

It has been the blessing of strong leadership.

It has been the blessing of effective witness.

It has been the blessing of spiritual power.

It has been the blessing of

SBC Observes 125th Year Of Founding

By Davis C. Woolley
Executive Secretary,
Historical Commission,
Southern Baptist Convention

Southern Baptists are observing the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention during 1970, with special attention given to the anniversary during the convention in Denver, June 1-4.

The observance will celebrate the organization of what now has become the nation's largest Protestant denomination on the historic date of May 10, 1845, when Baptists from eight states and the District of Columbia met in Augusta, Ga., for the purpose of "eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination in America."

The anniversary observance will seek to mark this significant milestone in such a manner as to increase understanding, appreciation and support for the life and work of Southern Baptists.

At the convention in Denver, the first evening session will be devoted to a multi-media dramatic production which will portray the historical highlights of Southern Baptists and point the way for a greater future.

The anniversary committee has outlined three objectives for this observance: (1) to improve Southern Baptists' understanding of their own heritage; (2) to relate the Christian commitment of Southern Baptists more meaningfully to the present and the future; and (3) to interpret more adequately to the denomination's various publics the progress of Southern Baptists as a part of the body of Christ.

The anniversary is shared by two of the convention's agencies. The Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board were both brought into being by the convention in 1845 and are also observing their 125th anniversaries.

Histories of both boards will be published for the occasion, and other anniversary special features are being planned. The history of the Home Mission Board has been written by the executive secretary, Arthur Rutledge, while the Foreign Mission Board book is a compilation of sections written by each of the area secretaries and the executive secretary, and edited by John D. Hughey, the board's secretary for Europe and the Middle East.

One of the anniversary features is a documentary film "Dimensions of Courage" showing how Southern Baptists are, where they came from, and what the plans are for the future.

This film was released for premier showing in 100 "M" Night Church Training rallies across the nation in the fall of 1969. The film is now available from Baptist Film Centers for viewing in churches all across the nation.

The film, "Dimensions of Courage," was prepared by a film production committee appointed to assist the convention's order of business committee in presenting a worthy observance of the anniversary. W. C. Fields, public relations secretary of the Executive Committee of the SBC, has served as chairman of the committee, and the public relations committee of the Executive Committee has assisted in making plans for the anniversary.

It has been the blessing of kingdom victory.

When one begins to try to measure what God has wrought for and through Southern Baptists he finds his heart leaping in praise.

Look at the convention today on its 125th anniversary. It is a mighty army of more than 11,000,000 Baptists. It is comprised of more than 34,000 churches spread all across the nation. It has a missionary program that covers much of America and reaches into more than 70 nations. It supports educational institutions, hospitals, children's homes, and other institutions and agencies for a mighty ministry in the name of Christ. It has developed a stewardship program which places more than \$17,000,000 per Sunday on the offering plates of the churches.

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Augusta, Georgia, May 10, 1845. --Among the 293 "delegates" coming to Augusta to organize the Southern Baptist Convention was a 32-member delegation from Virginia and Maryland. They traveled by train to Wilmington, N.C., and by boat from Wilmington to Charleston, S.C., transferring to the SCRR which took them to Hamburg, S.C., just across the river from Augusta. On the boat they encountered a severe storm that made them extremely seasick and caused them to fear a disastrous shipwreck. The SCRR and the Ga. RR offered reduced fare for those traveling to the Convention -- full fare to Augusta -- free passage on the way back as certified Convention "delegates." E. M. Hearne, Jr., artist. Used by courtesy the Historical Commission, SBC.



Augusta, Georgia, May 10, 1845. --On Saturday morning May 10, the publishers of the Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel presented a number of copies of their paper, containing reports of the Convention's proceedings. The daily paper carried full account of the Convention's proceedings including debates and votes expressed in the deliberations of the Convention. These accounts (preserved on microfilm) fill in the details of the meeting not recorded by the Convention secretaries. E. M. Hearne, Jr., artist. Used by courtesy the Historical Commission, SBC.



Augusta, Georgia, May 8, 1845. --William Bulfinch Johnson of Edgefield, S.C., was elected the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention in its organizational meeting in Augusta, May 8-13, 1845. Richard Fuller, Beaufort, S.C., pastor (seated) was named chairman of the committee to prepare a Constitution. The Convention adopted the Constitution of 13 articles, 11 of them proposed by Johnson which called for one convention with separate boards for each object of benevolent enterprise located at different places, and all amenable to the Convention. E. M. Hearne, Jr., artist. Used by courtesy the Historical Commission, SBC.

Those Days In May Of 1845; What Happened In Augusta

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tist Convention by this pattern as the first state convention in America. By 1845 state conventions had been organized in most states.

Dissatisfaction of Southern leaders with cooperative efforts through the America Baptist Home Mission Society, formed in 1832, became a divisive element. Baptist leaders in the South and West complained that this Society was neglecting mission fields in their areas. Such complaints were largely without foundation, but the effect on Southern minds was the same as if the charges of neglect had been true. This divisive issue prompted several calls for a Southern Baptist Convention prior to 1845.

Baptists initially managed to keep the slavery controversy out of the meetings of their national societies. But the inevitable happened. Radical opponents of slavery among Baptists of the North continued to agitate the slavery issue.

The final breaking point came when Alabama Baptists addressed resolutions to the Board of Managers of the General Convention demanding a specific avowal that slaveholders would be appointed as missionaries.

Baptists throughout the South were cut to the quick when they heard the board's reply, particularly the following statement:

"If... anyone should offer himself as a missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as his property, we could not appoint him. One thing is certain; we can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery."

Many Baptist leaders, North and South, concluded that continued cooperation was no longer possible or proper.

The Virginia Baptist Foreign Mission Society took the lead in calling for a consultative convention. On April 10, 1845, by agreement with Georgia Baptists, this Society proposed that all Baptist brethren, North, South, East, and West, who were "aggrieved by the recent decision of the Board," convene in Augusta, Georgia, on May 8, 1845, to consider the formation of a new denominational body.

The 293 delegates who met in Augusta in 1845, made momentous decisions which have vitally affected their denomination for almost 125 years. They represented only 166 of the 4,126 Baptist churches in the South which in 1845 reported a total membership of 351,951.

Over 97 per cent of the delegates were from four of the eight states represented. Five states affiliating with the convention sent no delegates. But the actions taken at Augusta had lasting significance for all.

1. Baptists in the South withdrew from their northern brethren and formed a new denominational body. This separation continues today.

2. They determined to unite the efforts of Baptists in the South in particular but in other areas as well in cooperative endeavor. History attests their success.

3. They created a new kind of national Baptist body, new in being and in character.

With all delegates properly seated on Thursday morning May 8, 1845, the meeting proceeded to the election of officers, choosing W. B. Johnson as president, Wilson Lumpkin and J. B. Taylor, vice-presidents, and Jesse Hartwell and James C. Crane as secretaries of the body.

The first major step toward separation from their northern brethren came when Richard Fuller moved that a committee of two from each state represented in the meeting be appointed to prepare a preamble and resolutions for the action of the con-

vention. Following the selection of the committee, with Fuller as chairman, the convention adjourned until 4:00 p. m.

That afternoon the body adopted rules of order. Fuller's committee made a report. But after considerable debate, the convention adjourned to 8:00 a.m. Friday. All agreed that too much haste was inadvisable.

Consideration Resumed
Resuming consideration of the report on Friday morning, the delegates engaged in a "full free, and harmonious discussion."

After referring to his own conservative position on this issue in the past, J. B. Jeter concluded: "I am now in favor of a separate organization, and the more I reflect upon the subject, the difficulties which at first presented themselves to my mind vanish, and I believe the cause of God will be promoted thereby."

Editor T. W. Haynes of South Carolina declared: "I go hand, heart and soul for the resolution." Layman Duncan of South Carolina also expressed support for a separate organization, but questioned the committee's recommendation that it be called a society.

"I prefer the term society, Chairman Richard Fuller explained, because the Baptist church could not in this way be divided."

Some of the leaders at Augusta, however, expressed reservations about withdrawal from Baptists in the North.

Following further discussion, Jonathan Davis, Georgia pastor, arose to express favor for the resolution, but questioned the wisdom of acting without assurance that the brethren of Tennessee, Kentucky, and other western states would unite with them in this matter.

Editor J. S. Baker of Georgia then related that he had in his possession letters from Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi declaring their support for separation. Representatives from Alabama and North Carolina rose to assure the convention of the support of their states.

At last the delegates were ready to vote. They unanimously approved the resolution, thereby demonstrat-

ing their determination to sever old ties and form their own denominational body. The nature of this new organization would be determined by its constitution.

The Fuller Committee, with the addition of W. B. Johnson and seven other delegates was instructed to prepare a constitution for the proposed organization.

The constitution they presented to the convention on Saturday morning was largely the work of a single member of the committee, William Bulfinch Johnson.

At an earlier meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Convention of which he was president, Johnson had unveiled a plan of organization that had been maturing in his mind for many years. In contrast to the old society plan, this new plan called for one convention embracing the whole denomination with separate and distinct boards for each object of benevolent enterprise, located at different places, and all amenable to the convention.

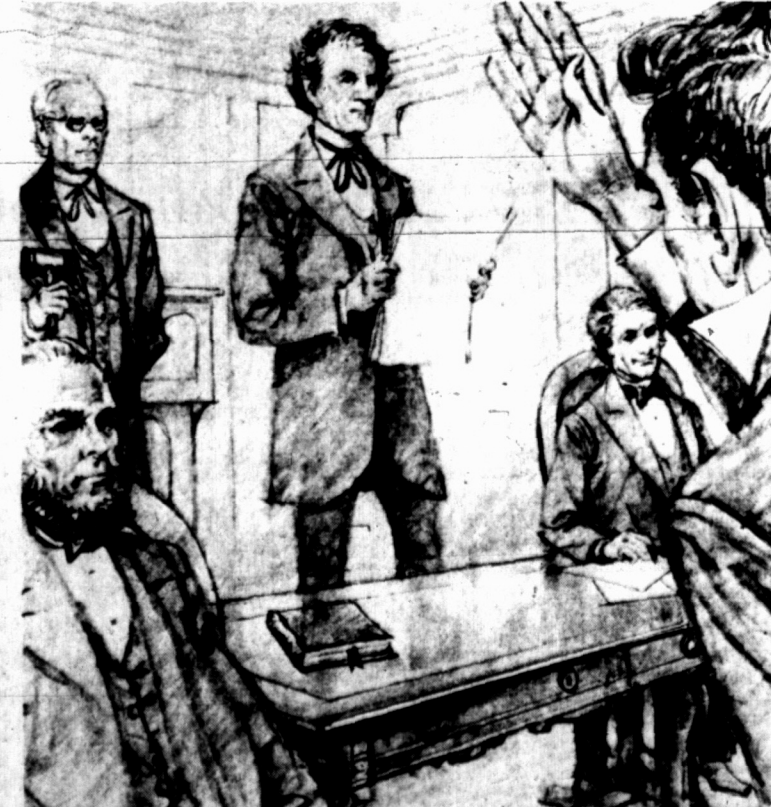
In Augusta, Johnson presented his proposed constitution to the constitutional committee. The 13-article constitution recommended to the convention by this committee on May 10 consists of Johnson's proposed 11-article constitution with slight revision and the addition of two new articles.

Presentation of the constitution to the convention on Saturday morning provoked debate on several matters. One was the proposed name: "Southern and Southwestern Baptist Convention."

Motion Prevailed
Eventually a motion prevailed to strike the words "and Southwestern."

After discussing and adopting each article, the assembly adopted the preamble and constitution by unanimous vote.

At the Saturday afternoon session J. B. Jeter moved that the convention convene in Richmond, Virginia, on June 10, 1846, for its first triennial session. He further resolved that the delegates assembled in Augusta proceed to elect provisional officers and boards to continue in office until the 1846 session.



Augusta, Ga., May 10, 1845. --Richard Fuller, pastor Beaufort, S.C., chairman of Committee on the Constitution for the new Southern Baptist Convention, presented the Constitution which was adopted after much debate. The proposal included for the name of the body "Southern and Southwestern Baptist Convention." Delegates voted objection to the proposal and voted to delete "and Southwestern" even though President W. B. Johnson favored including "Southwestern" as a part of the name. E. M. Hearne, Jr., artist. Used by courtesy the Historical Commission, SBC.

On Saturday night, the only evening session during the Augusta, meeting, the convention elected 33 members and officers for each of the boards, including a vice president from thirteen states and the District of Columbia, in addition to a fifteen-member board of managers.

Sunday was devoted to worship in the First Baptist Church building. That afternoon W. B. Johnson, assisted by J. B. Taylor, conducted a special Lord's Supper Service which was

attended by a large crowd. The custom of denominational communion was not uncommon in the 1840's.

When the convention reconvened for its final session on Monday morning, Secretaries Crane and Hartwell noted that only about one hundred were present for this last session, "many of the brethren having left the city."

During the final Monday session, the convention adopted resolutions on numerous matters including those to affiliate with auxiliary societies, to urge financial support of

the mission boards, and to urge the Domestic Mission Board to "take all prudent measures for the instruction of our colored population." The convention also voted to seek a charter of incorporation and to instruct the Domestic Mission Board to aid in establishing the Baptist cause in New Orleans.

The organizational meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention then adjourned. President W. B. Johnson led the closing prayer, after which they sang a hymn and departed.

Baptists Prior To The Year 1845

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One group, called the New Lights, formed strict Congregational churches and were named the Separatists.

"Separate" Baptists

Harsh restrictions forced many of these Separatists in the direction of the Baptists. When revival fires flickered out about 1780, groups and churches of Separatists found their way into Baptist fellowship. While there were only six Baptist churches in 1740, by 1800 then number had grown to 325.

These separate Baptists were highly emotional and evangelistic. They appealed particularly to the poor and less educated. Rugged individualists, they looked with suspicion on associations having authority over churches.

The Separate Baptists also met with opposition from Regular Baptists, who had emigrated from England and Wales. Because of opposition from the Regular Baptists, two Separate Baptists, Daniel Marshall and Shubael Stearnes, moved from Virginia to Guilford County, North Carolina where they organized a church on the banks of Sandy Creek in 1755.

Sandy Creek Baptist Church grew rapidly from an original sixteen members to more than six hundred. It reached out into surrounding communities to establish other churches. And the branches often sent out other branches before they could get a minister ordained themselves!

The South
In 1760 Sandy Creek Association was formed. Churches in North and South Carolina and Virginia were included until it was divided into a separate association for each state in 1770.

From North Carolina, Daniel Marshall moved further south into Georgia where he met with great success. Kiokee Creek Baptist Church was begun in Georgia in 1772 and the Georgia Baptist Association was formed in 1784.

After the Revolution the Separate and Regular Baptists gradually merged. Evangelism and missions, lifeblood of the Separates, still course through Southern Baptist veins.

Religious Liberty
Pre-Revolutionary War persecution pressured Baptists in two directions -- both ultimately good. Persecution scattered the Baptist witness into the newly opening areas of the New World. It also pushed Baptist churches into closer cooperation in their fight for religious liberty.

Warren Association, the first association of Baptists in New England, was formed in 1767, during the struggle for religious freedom. Isaac Backus, the apostle of liberty, was the association's forceful witness for this cause before the Continental Congress.

Religious liberty was slow in coming to the Baptists, but Baptists gained increasing respect for their ob-

vious patriotic views. Baptists were hawks in those days, marching in step to the fife and drums. Could fellow countrymen who echoed their cry for political freedom long deny the Baptists religious freedom?

Westward Migration

The severe depression in the new country following the Revolutionary War opened the tides of westward migration. And Baptists, generally poor and among the first to feel the economic pinch, moved in great numbers. They found the democracy of the frontier to their liking. Baptists were a part of the frontier, and as the frontier grew, so did Baptists.

Following the war, a spiritual revival again began to sweep the country. Out of the revivals came a growing desire to spread the gospel to all people, especially those in the West and to the American Indians.

Missionary societies sprang up among various church groups to "carry the gospel to the heathen." The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society was founded in Boston in 1802. The Philadelphia Association sent out itinerant missionaries for a brief period.

Credit for the first national foreign missionary society in America must go to the Congregationalists. They formed the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1810. Baptists also must thank the Congregationalists for providing them with an "instant" foreign mission program a few months later.

In February, 1812, five young men were ordained by the Congregationalists in Salem, Mass., prior to going to India as missionaries. Among the five were Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice.

"Baptist" Missions

After intense Bible study as they sailed to India on separate ships, both Judson and Rice arrived deciding to become Baptists. Judson wrote to Thomas Baldwin, pastor of First Baptist Church in Boston, to tell him the news.

To help support these new Baptist missionaries, in Baldwin's home was formed the Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel in India and Other Foreign Parts -- a title almost long enough to reach from Boston to Calcutta.

Judson and his wife Ann were forced by restrictions in India to move on to Burma. Rice returned to America to seek Baptist support of their work.

Due to his intense efforts, missionary societies were established in all important Baptist centers. In 1813, Rice conceived the plan of a general missionary society made up of representatives of smaller bodies that was later to form the basis for the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Triennial" Convention

In 1814 33 delegates from 11 states formed the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the United States of America for

Foreign Missions, more popularly called the Triennial Convention since it met every three years.

It was Rice who changed the scattered Baptist churches into a Baptist denomination.

A true unity developed among Baptists immediately following the Revolutionary War. The two Baptist groups who emigrated from England and Wales -- General Baptists who believed Christ died for all men, and Particular Baptists who held a more Calvinistic belief that Christ died for the elect only -- gradually combined and were known as Regular Baptists.

Regular Baptists' suspicions of the Separate Baptists who came out of the Congregational churches gradually were overcome. By the 1800's Regular and Separate Baptists were almost completely merged. Brought together by persecution, interest in missions, and a common belief, all were covered by the one name -- Baptist. But then -- between Baptists in the North and Baptists in the South -- differences arose.

"Society" vs "Convention"

In the North the "society" pattern of organization prevailed. In the South the trend was to a denominational body with separate organizations of state conventions and associations. The society organization fitted well with the pattern of independent town meetings of New England. In the South, tight knit state political organizations, plus semi-presbyterial influences brought by Stearns and Marshall from Congregationalism influenced the leaning toward denominational organization.

Another serious and more direct factor leading to a division among the Baptists who the controversy over slavery. This controversy affected all denominations, but particularly the Baptists.

Early Baptists were usually not in the slave holding class -- being too poor. But as southern agriculture boomed after the 1830's the Negro became much more valuable property. At the same time antislavery sentiments crystallized in New England Economic interest and antislavery forces clashed in the churches.

Where the revivals had been most successful, the antislavery movement found its largest support. It was strongest in New England in rural towns and in the country. More than two-thirds of this group were Methodists and Baptists.

Slavery

The slavery controversy, like a knife, sliced Baptist forces into two major groups, separating South from North, and cutting one of the great spiritual ties that had bound the union together. Differences became too great.

In 1845 Baptists in the South pulled out of the Triennial Convention and formed the Southern Baptist Convention in a meeting in Augusta, Ga.

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